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ABSTRACT

This case study examined one advanced undergraduate student's efforts to write on similar topics for three different audiences--an advanced composition class, a history of Western philosophy class, and a district meeting of Pi Alpha Theta. Initially the student was juggling the demands of writing research papers for her two courses, and the third audience was not even a consideration until a professor asked the student to revise the paper for a presentation to the history honorary society. The student was experienced enough to realize from the beginning that the English and history assignments were quite different, but she was not aware until the writing process began what effect writing on the same topic for two different audiences would have. The student's sense of audience and of purpose slowly evolved from "teacher as reader" to a synthesis of the two audiences into one academic audience that was interested in the philosophy and history of ideas presented in the papers. Revision centered mainly on shortening one paper and on composing a different conclusion. The third paper, however, required more indepth modification. Laura's awareness that the third audience was a listening rather than a reading audience provided her with a starting point. In her review, the student focused on clearly stating main ideas early in each paragraph, in emphasizing more conventional attitudes toward her topic; in deleting parenthetical comments; in discovering alternatives to frequently repeated words and phrases; and in removing most references to specific critics. Writing for a "real" audience successfully stimulated improvements in organization, development, and clarity. (Fourteen references are attached.) (KEH)

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The Evolution of a Research Paper for Multiple Audiences

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The Evolution of a Research Paper for Multiple Audiences

Eleanor Parks Gaunder

Most composition teachers and textbooks recommend that students determine who their audience is before they begin to write. But is this what composition students do? Over the last decade we have found that researchers and students have varied understandings of audience and that students may consider their audience early or late in the writing process--or not at all.

Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford discuss two concepts of audience, "audience addressed" and "audience invoked," to make the distinction between actual people to whom a text is directed and the audience constructed in the writer's imagination. These two views are not mutually exclusive; it is possible for a writer to both address and invoke an audience in the same paper. Douglas Park and Russell Long also distinguish between "real" and "fictionalized" audiences, but Walter Ong in "The Writer's Audience Is Always a Fiction" asserts that writers construct all audiences in their imaginations, even if there is an actual audience who will eventually read what is written.

Linda Flower explains that less experienced writers may not be able to cope with the cognitive load of both content and audience considerations at the same time; therefore, these less experienced writers often produce writer-based prose, whereas experienced writers are able to consider the reader throughout the composing process and produce reader-based prose. Peter Elbow suggests that audience awareness for both experienced and inexperienced writers sometimes facilitates ideas but sometimes blocks them. He stresses that when writers are sorting out their thoughts in the early stages of writing, audience awareness may be detrimental. Throughout Writing with Power he encourages audience consideration as the first step in revision. Bennett

Rafoth's research results with college freshmen substantiate Elbow's recommendation. Giving students a choice of information for their persuasive essays or information about their specific audience, he found that both good and below-average college freshmen tended to defer audience consideration until revision.

Recent studies begin to show how and when audience consideration impacts writing. The college students in Kathleen Black's study who were given information about their audience were judged by their audience to be more persuasive than the students who did not receive the information and their arguments showed a higher level of audience adaptation. Duane Roen and R. J. Willey found that freshmen who attended to audience during revision received higher quality rating than those who attended to audience during drafting.

Notions of audience may change as the paper progresses. Carol Berkenkotter noticed that professional writers created rhetorical contexts, including hypothetical audiences, which they revised during the process of discovery. Robert Roth also observed that writers' concepts of audience may change in productive ways. Although one of the advanced student writers in his study did not define an external audience at all, the other two revised their audience representations, keeping their audience definitions "flexible, multi-dimensional, and variable" (51).

The research about audience has for the most part focused on writing a paper for a single audience. But what happens when a student writes a paper for more than one audience?

Writing for Multiple Audiences

This case study examines one advanced undergraduate student's efforts to write on similar topics for three different audiences: an Advanced Composition class, a History of Western Philosophy class, and a district meeting of Phi

Alpha Theta, a history honorary. Initially, the student was juggling the demands of writing research papers for English and history courses in a mid-sized state university. The third audience was not even a consideration until her history professor asked her to revise her paper for presentation.

Students assigned more than one research paper in a semester occasionally choose topics so that the reading they are doing for one of the papers will be applicable to another research paper. What many of them do not realize at first is that the audience for one paper is different from the other and that the expectations in different disciplines may not be the same. Laura, a senior English and history double major, was experienced enough to realize from the beginning that the assignments for her History of Western Philosophy class and her Advanced Composition class were quite different, but she was not aware until the writing process began what effect writing on the same topic for two different audiences would have. Her history research paper assignment stressed that she was to concentrate on the history of ideas, analyzing in depth one aspect of a philosopher's works. Her Advanced Compcsition research paper topic was utopias. She chose Plato's Republic for both assignments, focusing on his view of the role of women, but for her Advanced Composition paper she decided to contrast his view of women in The Laws to his earlier, more liberal position in The Republic. Over two semesters she wrote and revised eight drafts of her papers, four during the fall semester for her two courses and four during the spring semester for the paper presentation.

Laura's usual writing process for all of her essays throughout the semester was the process she used when writing her research papers. She planned in advance by writing notes and rough outlines. She preferred to write first drafts in ink on notebook paper and then type them on the Apple IIe computer, which she was just learning to use. She attended to most of her

numerous typographical errors as she typed her text into the word processor. Generally not an extensive reviser, she made primarily meaning-preserving changes. The Bridwell taxonomy of revisions, which I used to analyze the revisions Laura made, identified substitution as the main revision operation in all but one of her papers. She edited and revised concurrently both when she composed initially and when she revised. During retrospective protocols, Laura tended to explain her revisions according to her own preferences rather than in terms of audience most of the time, but clarity was a fairly frequent reason for her revisions.

Laura considered the research paper for Advanced Composition the most challenging paper she had to write all semester. She identified three reasons for its greater difficulty: time pressure, difficulty with transitions between sections of her paper, and especially concerns about her audience. In spite of her good time management all semester, she ended up writing her research papers for Advanced Composition and History of Western Philosophy practically at the same time. The papers were due within a week of one another and she wanted to complete the reading of both dialogues before she began writing. Her concept of audience and purpose evolved as she simultaneously considered the two papers.

Laura began her consideration of audience for her research papers by identifying what she thought her professors' expectations were. She said that each professor expected a "well conceived, well written paper." For Advanced Composition, she was expected to write a longer paper, which required more extensive research. However, other than reading to learn about Plato's utopian society, Laura's initial purpose for her Advanced Composition paper was not well formed. Only after skimming The Laws to see if Plato changed his utopian beliefs did Laura decide to contrast Plato's ideas about women's role

in society as presented in both The Republic and The Laws. She considered her history assignment much more challenging because it was neither an explanation of utopian ideas nor a comparison/contrast, but an in-depth analysis of the ideas--a challenge which she described as "just a puzzle." She had conferences with both of her professors to get their reactions to her tentative topics and to better determine what they expected.

As she began writing her paper, she was writing to "teacher as reader." In spite of having read several drafts of other essays to the Advanced Composition class or to one or more of the writers in her peer workshop group, she seemed to begin her writing with little concept of her reader other than finding out what her teachers expected. Her focus was on understanding the philosophical ideas and trying to communicate that understanding in language.

Her struggle with audience and purpose increased when she decided to write both papers simultaneously, highlighting in pink anything about The Laws since that information would only be in the Advanced Composition paper. She said that her first draft was difficult to write because the "term papers are different" for the two courses. In particular she said she was having difficulty "trying to work the utopia into the history paper to give my English professor what she expected." She revised this first draft which she turned into her history professor, who reacted positively to the highlighted material about The Laws as well as to the text about The Republic. He encouraged her to work on one paper for both courses with awareness of both audiences. The main difference between the papers would be that the history paper would be shorter since it would not contain the last several pages about The Laws and it would have a different conclusion.

Using her history professor's comments as a basis, Laura then proceeded to type her paper onto the word processor, making 126 revisions and numerous

corrections of typographical errors. The guiding principle of her revisions was to explain clearly and in-depth the ideas about the role of women in both dialogues. As was her typical pattern all semester, she mostly made substitutions for clarity or more effective phrasing. However, she did change the content in several places, adding or deleting 13 sentences and 8 multi-sentence sections of her paper. During the writing of these two papers Laura's sense of audience and sense of purpose evolved. By the time she completed her final draft for Advanced Composition (and her history course as well), she had synthesized the two audiences into an academic audience who was interested in the philosophy and history of ideas.

Revision for a Listening Audience

This academic audience was later somewhat redefined when Laura's history professor asked her to consider presenting her paper to a Phi Alpha Theta district meeting the following semester. Her first reaction to her new audience was that it was much more intimidating than the audience she had been reading to regularly in Advanced Composition because it would be primarily professors who were superior to her in knowledge. And because she had not attended a Phi Alpha Theta meeting before, she really struggled with an understanding of what this audience would be like. She used herself as a new participant in a Phi Alpha Theta meeting to begin determining audience needs.

Her awareness that Phi Alpha Theta would be a listening rather than a reading audience provided her with a starting point. She focused on clearly stating main ideas early in each paragraph, in emphasizing Plato's return to more conventional attitudes toward women in The Laws, and in deleting parenthetical comments. She made a list of alternate ways to say The Laws so she would not be using the same phrase incessantly. One of her major concerns was how much reference to the critics she should make in the body of the text.

She gradually removed most references to specific critics, sometimes substituting "According to critics" rather than the name of the specific person. In the final revision she removed all parenthetical footnotes, so she could read more smoothly without having to attend to the scholars' names at all.

Consistent with her usual pattern, she made many substitutions of phrases and clauses because of her concern for clarity. On the first of the four revisions she did in preparation for the meeting, she wrote on a print-out over 40 notes to herself about how and why to revise. Some of these were comments about the content, such as "develop and support, explain how it liberated the men," while other comments were tentative rephrasings that she knew were not yet satisfactory which she often prefaced with the phrase "Something like:" and then the revision. She revised this draft more extensively than any of the four drafts written the first semester, making 178 revisions of content. And her changing audience was the main reason for these revisions.

Implications for Teaching

This case study has examined both a writer's efforts to write for two audiences simultaneously and to accomodate a changing audience. It suggests that the writer's concept of audience is subject to revision and that in-depth revision of papers sometimes results from revision of the writer's concept of audience. It further suggests, as Walter Ong and Ede and Lunsford have asserted, that a writer may create a concept of audience even when a concrete audience exists. This study is, of course, limited in its scope, but it does suggest some implications for teaching.

Composing is dynamic. Not only does a paper evolve, but, as Robert Roth points out, the concept of audience may evolve as well. Therefore, students

with a relatively flexible audience concept may be able to take advantage of possibilities that students who only think about audience during planning ignore. We may want to encourage students to record decisions that they are making about the research paper, including decisions about audience, in their writing logs. Research papers involve working with so much content that some students may not begin to make effective decisions about audience until they have a rough draft. Our responsibilities are to be sure that they consider audience at some point and to help them define an audience if they are having difficulty.

Laura started with little sense of audience other than trying to determine what her professors wanted. Maxine Hairston has suggested that this is typical of many advanced student writers, whom she describes as having "almost no sense of audience when they write. Most of their papers are 'teacher papers,' written solely for the teacher in the role of judge and examiner, or ... 'blue sky' papers, written to some unidentified and faceless person" (198). Athough Robert Roth did not find this to be true for the three advanced writers he observed writing persuasive essays, the research paper, with its greater length, formal tone and academic audience, may at least initially present more difficulties to student writers than other types of writing. Most students do perceive the teacher as the audience of a research paper; it is for many of them an academic exercise in which they choose one of several roles: pedantic scholar, uncritical reporter of others' ideas, or non-engaged writer. Yet Laura's concept of audience evolved beyond a "teacher paper," perhaps because she was not writing for one teacher but two. The effect of expanding the audience was to make the research paper go beyond a "teacher paper" in which ideas are reported to a paper in which ideas were examined.

To avoid formulaic efforts by students, Hairston suggests multiple drafts, models of well written papers, and ways to encourage students to take risks. Perhaps one of the ways to stimulate both multiple drafts and risk-taking is to design research projects with actual audiences and real purposes. Paper readings are one possibility. So are audiences, such as school boards and legislators, as potential recipients of the final research paper or a position paper based upon the research findings. As in this case, actual audiences beyond the classroom may stimulate more thorough audience consideration and more thorough revision. Laura made several improvements to her text because she knew that a listening audience would have to know her main points before she elaborated on them and that they would want her to stay focused on the change in Plato's thinking on women's roles in society. Audience considerations stimulated improvements in organization, development, and clarity.

However, the real audience in this case created as many problems as it solved. The greatest problem was fear, both of the unknown and of presentation in front of a live audience. Even with the support of her history professor, Laura was apprehensive about the paper reading. Her apprehension probably was as positive as it was negative, inasmuch as she revised very thoroughly to prepare for the paper reading, but she had to cope with nagging apprehension throughout the revision process. Another problem this "real" audience created for Laura was that although the audience was actual, she had very little conception of what it was really like. She could only imagine an audience based upon her projection of herself and her history professors. Not knowing whether she had an accurate picture of her intended audience tended to increase her apprehension. If we ask students to write papers for actual audiences, we must give them as much information about the

audience as we can and also provide encouragement when they express apprehension about tackling the assignment.

Allowing a student, even an advanced student, to write a research paper for two courses simultaneously is something I have always had reservations about. Interestingly enough, I now have mixed feelings about this issue. Having a broader audience may have been helpful in this instance. Although Laura started with a "teacher as reader" audience, there was no way she could write for "teacher as reader" for only one of the two courses and be successful in the second paper. She had to delve into the expectations that both teachers had, and as a result, she developed a fuller understanding of her topic and of her audiences. Nevertheless, my basic reservation still remains. Laura did not write two separate papers to two separate audiences. She was able to write one paper, which is the shortcut most students are trying to take. I am still uncertain whether a paper on another topic or a paper for two other disciplines would gel as successfully as this one did. I am even more concerned that a less experienced writer would not even be aware of the need to consider both audiences. Nevertheless, students who try to write on the same topic for more than one audience will no doubt learn much in the attempt.

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